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ALSO FOR AF/EPS CAROL TRIMBLE  
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SUBJECT: DHRF GRANT ENCOURAGES WOMEN CANDIDATES IN NIGER DELTA

REF: LAGOS 1239

¶1. (U) Summary: Twenty-eight women candidates, campaign coordinators, and aspiring political and party leaders attended the October 24-25 Democracy and Human Rights Fund (DHRF) workshop, QMainstreaming Women Leaders into the Political Process in NigeriaQs Niger Delta States of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, and Edo", sponsored by Niger Delta Professionals for Development (NIDPRODEV). The participants discussed democratic principles, created election strategies, and learned from experienced political leaders. End Summary.

#### Workshop Participants from Diverse Backgrounds

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¶2. (U) Workshop participants were drawn from a wide range of backgrounds, including current candidates, chairs of womenQs societies, agency directors and members of registration monitoring committees. Among the offices for which the women are candidates are State House of Assembly and Federal House of Representatives. A participant explained to the SSH/DHRF Coordinator that, although the women were running for office from different parties, they had agreed to encourage and support each other in their campaigns.

#### Supporter of Female Candidate Describes Death Threat

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¶3. (U) A Commissioner in the Bayelsa State Civil Service, also a former member of the Bayelsa State Assembly, is currently campaigning for a woman. She described a death threat recently sent by text message: "If your life is worth living, you are advised to stop supporting [this woman] as candidate. If you dare continue, you will be sent to meet your ancestors in cold blood." The commissioner told the group that she informed the police. She believes the threat came from the campaign of an opposing candidate.

#### Campaign Manager Shares Experience and Offers Advice

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¶4. (U) On the workshopQs second day, a former national assembly member, now campaign manager for a gubernatorial candidate, contrasted his experiences with political systems in Nigeria and in other countries. Based on his observations of elections in both Britain and Bangladesh, he outlined the challenges to free and fair elections in Nigeria. In his opinion, all elections in Nigeria should be held in one day, because the current system allows the incoming president and governors, who take office after the first round of elections, to influence the elections for other offices weeks later. Nigeria, he warned, has "leadership by the few for the few." Nonetheless, he noted that many stable democratic countries went through similar stages, and that military decentralization has greatly decreased chances

of a military coup.

¶5. (U) He also gave practical instructions for running a political campaign. He advised the women to create a mission statement, decide on a slogan, and enlist intelligent aides. For women candidates, he advised they get to know their constituents, choose their support committees carefully and cultivate the media. He encouraged the women to become active in formal and informal political structures, including participating in party caucuses.

¶6. (U) Following his discussion of "godfatherism" in Nigeria, one woman asked the presenter for his advice on how to exchange godfathers for godmothers. His response, that such a change would be like "exchanging a monkey for a baboon," reflected his condemnation of how eminences grises have marred the Nigerian political process. The women however, took the remark as a challenge. As each individual stood to engage the speaker, she would begin by speaking softly, then build to a stronger tone, and conclude loudly that women are as capable of leading as men. One participant's fiery speech called not only for support for her candidacy, but for a revolution as well.

#### Political Aspirants Define Obstacles, Brainstorm Solutions

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¶7. (U) Following the speaker's presentation, the women divided into groups according to their State of residence: Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta. In each group, they created election plans, campaign strategies, learned to consider constraints and recognize opportunities. Among the obstacles the participants identified were stereotypes of women's "place," low education levels of women, political environments hostile to women, poverty, low self-esteem, systemic corruption, the public

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perception of politics as "dirty," and the inaccessibility of women to people in power. Several women related how men had excluded them from party caucuses or other decision-making opportunities, often hiding behind cultural norms. One participant described how men would offer her a ride home from a political meeting, then return to the meeting where they would then make decisions.

¶8. (U) To carry out their campaign plans, the participants determined that they must identify funding sources, support other women, consult women leaders, increase the number of women commissioners, conduct sensitization programs, monitor election activities, monitor women's campaigns, personally contact chiefs and other traditional rulers for support, increase women's representation on state action committees, contact delegates, and mobilize local women's committees.

#### Confidence-Building a Major Element of Workshop

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¶9. (U) A management consultant told the SSH/DHRF Coordinator that what made this workshop unique is its emphasis on boosting the self-confidence of the women participants. Although there are many intelligent and qualified women, they face so many obstacles that it becomes difficult to believe they can be successful in politics. The second day's speaker also stressed the importance of self-confidence, saying that women are brought up to fear, and that fear must be overcome. Mantras of encouragement adorned the walls of the simple conference hall, and were echoed in the workshops: "I know that I can succeed".

#### Workshop Launches Support for Women's Campaigns

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¶10. (U) On the workshop's final day, participants created a song, QVote for Woman-O,Q which NIDPRODEV plans to have produced professionally and to run as an advertisement for women candidates on local radio. The close of the workshop coincided with the first day of voter registration, and several women told SSH/DHRF coordinator that they were eager to become involved in

voter registration when they returned home.

BROWNE